U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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STATEMENT OF ROBERT HENRI BINDER, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR POLICY
AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, BEFORE
THE HOUSE PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE REGARDING H.R. 9723, SEPTEMBER 23, 1971.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss

H.R. 9723.

Specifically, H.R. 9723 would authorize the Department of Transpor-

tation and the General Services Administration to select an adequate portion

of lot 813, square 299 within the District of Columbia located between

Twelfth and Fourteenth Streets and Maine Avenue and "D" Street Southwest

for a heliport, construct on that site necessary minimum heliport facilities,

and lease the site to any person who is willing to operate it as a heliport.

The bill would also amend the Federal Aviation Act of 1958 to provide for

the establishment of availability charges for certified helicopter transpor-

tation.

The Department is fully aware of the potential offered by helicopter

service in fulfilling the need for rapid airport access. This is true not

only with respect to the Washington area, but with respect to many metropoli-

tan areas throughout the Nation. Over the years as the population of our

large metropolitan areas has increased, it has been necessary to locate the

new airports needed to serve those areas further and further from the center

city. The result has been that the speed advantage that air travel offers

has been seriously reduced because of the inevitable delay facing the passenger

in travelling between the airport and his home or office. Throughout the last several years, a number of attempts have been made to provide helicopter service to and from the center city, and in all cases, operators have experienced a number of serious difficulties, financial and otherwise. The Department believes, however, that further efforts to enhance the feasibility of providing such helicopter service should continue to be explored.

As for the establishment of the heliport site for the southwest area of the District of Columbia as proposed by H.R. 9723, the Department strongly recommends that no action be taken at this time. Access from the center city to metropolitan airports is very much a local transportation problem. We are not aware that this heliport proposal has yet been analyzed through the local planning process, including an analysis of available alternatives, and of the environmental impact of each done by the body which plans and proposes to operate such a facility.

Another factor which calls for a delay in the establishment of the site proposed in H.R. 9723 is the reopening by the Civil Aeronautics Board of its Washington/Baltimore Helicopter Service Investigation. In addition to offering a forum for determining the environmental impact of helicopter operations into the District of Columbia, that investigation will provide an opportunity for careful consideration of such factors as the financial viability of such operations.

Now I would like to turn to the provisions of the bill respecting the imposition of "availability charges" for certified helicopter transportation. The Department opposes these amendments. We understand the purpose of these

provisions of the bill is to provide for the payment by passengers purchasing tickets for flights originating or terminating in the Washington area of a charge which will subsidize a helicopter operator serving those airports. The Department has in the past opposed this type of cross subsidy. We believe it is totally unfair to require passengers on such flights to pay for a service for which they may have no need or interest. Those who use the service should bear its direct costs. H.R. 9723 would unfairly afford airline passengers choosing helicopter connections, in lieu of surface common carriers, a preference that is denied other airline passengers using other modes of surface common carriage.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my prepared statement. Now I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.